

Message Text

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PAGE 01 KATHMA 03528 071120Z

46

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, NP

SUBJ: EDITOR OF THE GORKHAPATRA FIRED

1. GOPAL PRASAD BHATTARAI, EDITOR OF THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED GORKHAPATRA, WAS RELIEVED OF HIS DUTIES AUGUST 5TH BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE NEWSPAPER. CAUSE FOR HIS DISMISSAL WAS THE APPEARANCE IN AUGUST 1 EDITIONS OF A MISTAKEN REFERENCE TO QUEEN MOTHER RATNA RATHER THAN QUEEN AISHWARYA AS ACCOMPANYING THE KING ON HIS DECEMBER 1973 VISIT TO THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA.

2. COMMENT: THE PALACE HAS ALWAYS BEEN SENSITIVE TO JOURNALISTIC ERRORS ABOUT THE ROYAL FAMILY. IN 1973, CHANDRA LAL JHA, EDITOR OF THE PRIVATELY-OWNED NEPAL TIMES, WAS SEVERELY PUNISHED FOR THE MISPRINT OF A PALACE ANNOUNCEMENT THANKING THE PUBLIC FOR LETTERS OF CONDOLENCE FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF THE KING'S GRANDMOTHER. PUBLICATION OF THE NEPAL TIMES WAS SUSPENDED FOR A PERIOD OF TIME AND JHA WAS FINED AND IMPRISONED FOR SEVERAL MONTHS. EDITORIAL REACTION TO THE GORKHAPATRA'S MISSTEP HAS BEEN LIMITED AND MIXED TO DATE. AN EDITORIAL WRITTEN IN THE COMMONER, A PRIVATELY-OWNED DAILY, PRIOR TO BHATTARAI'S DISMISSAL AND REFERRING TO JHA'S FATE, ASKED THE GOVERNMENT TO BE "EQUAL-HANDED" IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE. THE MOTHERLAND, ON THE OTHER HAND, IN ITS AUGUST 7 ISSUE ASKED THAT THE GOVERNMENT BE

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PAGE 02 KATHMA 03528 071120Z

LENIENT. THERE IS, OF COURSE, THE USUAL SPATE OF RUMORS AND

SPECULATION SURROUNDING BHATTARAI'S DISMISSAL. SOME CONTENT THAT THE GORKHAPATRA'S SLIP PROVIDED A CONVENIENT RATIONALE FOR WHAT AMOUNTED TO A POWER PLAY AMONG THE MEMBERS OF THE GORKHAPATRA EDITORIAL STAFF TO REMOVE BHATTARAI. OTHER RUMORS HAVE IT THAT BHATTARAI HAS ALREADY PLEADED FOR PALACE PARDON AND WILL BE REINSTATED. CARGO

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